

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 AID-20 EB-11 CIEP-02 TRSE-00 STR-08 OMB-01

CEA-02 SIL-01 LAB-06 COME-00 OPIC-12 DOTE-00 DRC-01

/167 W

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R 281638Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6709

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, UK

SUBJECT: DESPITE SIGNS OF PROGRESS IN MINERS' DISPUTE

A BLEAK BEGINNING OF 1974 REMAINS LIKELY

REF: LONDON'S 17422

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: A RENEWAL OF TALKS BETWEEN THE
NATIONAL UNION OF MINEWORKERS (NUM) AND THE NATIONAL
COAL BOARD (NCB) INDICATED PROGRESS BUT HAS SO FAR
FAILED TO END THE DISPUTE IN THE COAL INDUSTRY. THESE
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TALKS HAVE BEEN ACCELERATED AND CLOSE CONTACT HAS BEEN

CONTINUING BETWEEN THE PARTIES AND THE PAY BOARD, BUT IT CONTINUES TO REMAIN LIKELY THAT THE THREE-DAY WEEK WILL BE INSTITUTED WITH THE BEGINNING OF 1974. LARGE SCALE LAYOFFS HAVE ALREADY TAKEN PLACE IN ENGLAND AND WALES AND FURTHER WORK FORCE CUTS ARE EXPECTED AS THE THREE-DAY WEEK ACTUALLY GOES INTO EFFECT. IN THE MEANWHILE, WHILE LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS CONTINUE THEIR "GO-SLOW" BAN, WITH CONTINUING DISRUPTIVE EFFECTS ON TRANSPORT, THE POWER ENGINEERS ARE EXPECTED VERY SHORTLY TO END THEIR BAN ON WORKING OUTSIDE NORMAL HOURS. END SUMMARY

2. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NUM AND THE NCB HAVE HELD SEVERAL MEETINGS SINCE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EMPLOYMENT, WILLIAM WHITELAW, MADE HIS PLEA TO THE MINERS LAST DECEMBER 20TH TO AGREE TO REOPENING OF TALKS WITH THE NCB. THESE DISCUSSIONS HAVE CENTERED AROUND FINDING A METHOD -- ACCEPTABLE TO THE PAY BOARD -- OF COMPUTING TIME WHICH THE AVERAGE MINER SPENDS PREPARING FOR WORK AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH SHIFT, AND CLEANING UP AFTER. (IT WAS THE PAY BOARD ITSELF, AFTER IT MET A JOINT NCB-NUM DELEGATION ON DECEMBER 21, WHICH HELPED POINT THE WAY TOWARDS A POSSIBLE SETTLEMENT OF THE DISPUTE BY CITING APPROPRIATE STAGE THREE PAY CODE REGULATIONS.)

3. AGREEMENT ON THE SCOPE AND EXTENT OF COMPUTATIONS FOR "WAITING TIME," AS THIS BEFORE AND AFTER SHIFT PERIOD IS CALLED, IS DIFFICULT. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NUM AND THE NCB ARE MEETING TODAY (DECEMBER 28) IN ORDER TO FIND DEFINITIONS TO PRESENT TO THE PAY BOARD. EVEN IF THEY REACH AN AGREEMENT ACCEPTABLE TO THE PAY BOARD, THE NUM EXECUTIVE MUST THEN DECIDE TO RECOMMEND TO THE MINERS IN THE COAL FIELDS, VOTING BY SECRET BALLOT, TO ACCEPT THE ACCORD (IN ORDER TO ASSURE AN AFFIRMATIVE VOTE.) IF THIS SCENARIO IS FOLLOWED, THE BALLOT PROCEDURE COULD TAKE AS LONG AS SEVERAL WEEKS. (A MUCH MORE HOPEFUL SCENARIO, ALTHOUGH FAR LESS LIKELY IN VIEW OF THE INTERNAL POLITICAL DIVISIONS WITHIN THE NUM

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EXECUTIVE, IS THAT THE EXECUTIVE WOULD AGREE TO A SUSPENSION OF THE OVERTIME BAN WHILE A BALLOT IS BEING TAKEN.)

4. IN THE MEANWHILE, THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION FOR A THREE-DAY WEEK STILL STANDS. ITS PROBABLE IMPOSITION HAS ALREADY REGISTERED A VERY NEGATIVE EFFECT ON EMPLOYMENT. THE DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT ESTIMATED

YESTERDAY (DECEMBER 27) THAT ABOUT 400,000 WORKERS IN THE MIDLANDS AND THE NORTHWEST OF ENGLAND HAVE ALREADY BEEN LAID OFF TEMPORARILY DUE TO CAUSES RELATED TO THE ENERGY CRISIS. (DE STATISTICS FOR OTHER AREAS OF THE UK HAVE NOT YET BEEN ANNOUNCED.) UNEMPLOYMENT IS EXPECTED TO INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY AS THE THREE-DAY WEEK BEGINS TO TAKE EFFECT. THE THREE-DAY WEEK IS ALREADY CAUSING VERY SERIOUS PROBLEMS OF PLANNING BY INDUSTRY. INDUSTRY IS VERY MUCH CONCERNED ABOUT SUCH VITAL QUESTIONS AS TO WHETHER OVERTIME MUST BE PAID FOR SATURDAY WORK IF THAT DAY WERE TO END A THREE DAY CYCLE, WHETHER IT MUST HONOR AGREEMENTS WHICH INCLUDE A GUARANTEED FIVE-DAY WEEK, AND OTHER

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ISSUES. TRADE UNIONS ON THE OTHER HAND ARE INSISTING THAT THESE PROTECTIONS MUST BE HONORED.

5. INsofar AS THE OTHER MAJOR DISPUTES ARE CONCERNED, THERE HAS BEEN THE ASSOCIATED SOCIETY OF LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS AND FIREMEN WHO ARE CONTINUING THEIR "SLOW-DOWN" DISPUTE WITH CONSEQUENT DISRUPTION OF TRANSPORT. BUT THE LONG STANDING DISPUTE BY THE POWER ENGINEERS APPEARS LIKELY TO BE RESOLVED TODAY. THE ELECTRICAL POWER ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION IS MEETING TODAY TO DISCUSS PAY BOARD COMMENTS ON A NEW PROPOSAL FROM THE CENTRAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ELECTRICITY GENERATING BOARD (CEGB). MANY OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE ENGINEERS WILL ACCEPT THE PROPOSAL. THE END OF THEIR DISPUTE WILL HELP SOMEWHAT IN THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THAT IT WILL RESULT IN A MORE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF THE LIMITED ELECTRIC POWER AVAILABLE.

6. COMMENT: VARIOUS LEADING ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE DISPUTE SUCH AS JOE GORMLEY OF THE NUM, AND WHITELAW, HAVE EMPHASIZED, AT ONE POINT OR ANOTHER, THAT AS LONG AS THE DISPUTANTS CONTINUE TO MEET AND "TALK," THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT IT WILL BE RESOLVED. THE PROBLEM NOW, EVEN IF AGREEMENT IS REACHED BETWEEN THE PARTIES AND THE PAY BOARD, IS ONE OF SPEED. HOW FAST CAN ALL PARTIES CONCERNED BE ABLE TO MOVE, IF NOT COMPLETELY TO STAVE OFF THE THREE-DAY WEEK, AT LEAST TO CIRCUMSCRIBE SHARPLY ITS MOST DAMAGING EFFECTS. IN ANY EVENT, IF THE DISPUTE IS RESOLVED, MUCH CREDIT WILL GO TO WILLIAM WHITELAW FOR GETTING THE PARTIES AROUND THE NEGOTIATING TABLE AGAIN.

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